



San
Joaquin
River
Management
Program

P.O. Box 942836, Sacramento, CA 94236-0001

April 26, 2001

Ms. Patricia Ferrigno
Merced River Stakeholder Group
11572 Shaffer Road
Winton, California 95388

Dear Ms. Ferrigno:

I am writing in support of the "River Town Hall Series for the Lower Merced River Watershed" education and outreach program proposed by the Merced River Stakeholder Group.

The San Joaquin River Management Program provides a forum to identify problems and solutions to issues related to wildlife, flood protection, water quality, water supply, fisheries, and recreation. The SJRMP Action Team and Advisory Council have reviewed and discussed this proposal, and support efforts to increase public awareness and education regarding the value of the San Joaquin River watershed.

The Advisory Council supports this program and understands that this project will raise the awareness regarding water resource issues among local communities along the Merced River.

The 1995 San Joaquin River Management Plan recommends education projects related to recreation, wildlife, and fisheries (see p. 38). This recommendation is based on a need to develop education programs for all interested parties and to illustrate the benefits and functions of an improved San Joaquin River system.

If you have any questions in this regard, please contact Paula Landis, Action Team Chair, at (559) 230-3310.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Ramirez'.

Tim Ramirez, Advisory Council Chair
San Joaquin River Management Program

**SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTATION
IS ON THE
FOLLOWING PAGES**

CONCEPT PROPOSAL FORM I

For proposals with emphasis on capacity building, education and outreach, or research

Use this form to describe your concept for a proposal or project to apply to the CALFED Watershed Program for funding support. Use only the space provided, leaving at least a half inch margin with type size no smaller than 10 points. These guidelines are also available in electronic format on the Watershed Program web site:

baydeltawatershed.org

Project and Applicant Information:

Name of project: ARiver Town Hall Series for the Lower Merced River Watershed@	Budget Estimate: Funds requested: \$90,000 Match (cash & inkind): \$20,000 TOTAL: \$110,000
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Project Applicants(s) and/or Principal Investigator(s) and affiliation(s) B use an additional sheet if necessary:

The Merced River Stakeholder Group is the primary applicant. The group is composed of landowners, industry, environmental interests, state, federal and local agencies, recreationists and citizens with an interest in the conservation and restoration of the lower Merced River and Watershed. This project also supports and is supported by the Merced River Education Initiative, a grassroots initiative among educators and Merced County community members

Project manager or contact person, address, telephone and email (if fiscal agent is different, provide that information, also):

Merced River Stakeholder Group, c/o Pat (Patricia) Ferrigno, 11572 Shaffer Road, Winton, CA 95388 (209) 358-9400,
PBFerrigno@aol.com

Fiscal Agent: East Merced Resource Conservation District, Merced Irrigation District Foundation or local non-profit currently under formation. First two entities have expressed willingness, should local non-profit not yet be established when funds are available.

Project Abstract (include the county, watershed or other geographic reference):

This project will create a series of informational River Town Hall programs to provide information and education to landowners, industry, agriculture, environmental interests, state, federal and local agencies, recreationists and citizens about important topics relating to the lower Merced River, Merced County, generally downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam.. A selected list of topics identified by the Merced River Stakeholder Group included Water Quality, TMDL requirements, Nutrient inputs (Dairies are a common land use in this watershed), Salmon Restoration, Mercury contamination, best management practices in a variety of adjacent to river land uses, water supply management and local irrigation district operations. The Merced River Stakeholder Group and Technical Advisory Committee was established in 1998, funded by the Anadromous Fish Restoration Program of the CVPIA, to create a public forum where local support for restoration actions could be identified. CALFED has provided funding to Stillwater Sciences to develop a restoration plan for the lower river, with a focus on geomorphic and riparian process and functionality. This program is progressing, but in the process the Stakeholder Group has come to realize that there are many more issues related to the river and how it affects their lives. They presently feel that they do not have the breadth of experience within the community to clearly identify and prioritize their needs in the watershed, so the first step in moving ahead is to bring the topical expertise to the community in an informative manner. To implement this project will require hiring a part-time coordinator to work with the Stakeholder Group to confirm the desired topic areas, to arrange for speakers, facilities, event promotion and evaluation. Funding is also needed for speaker honoraria, travel, facilities rental, publicity, and notification.

If your concept proposal is not selected for further consideration in this round of funding, would you like referral to other possible funding sources? YES XX NO

1. Describe your anticipated outcome, or what you plan to achieve, and what practices or programs you intend to use. If a research project, explain the hypothesis and methods on which your concept is based.

The basic hypothesis for this River Town Hall Series is that an informed community is better able to identify watershed issues, and to resolve watershed problems than a community which is poorly informed and fragmented in its knowledge. The current restoration plan development process has provided many landowners with new ideas about how to resolve problems on their riverside properties by increasing the common understanding of fluvial geomorphic processes. The Stakeholder Group dialogue has also increased local awareness of regulatory requirements, but in a manner that has instilled a neutral to positive response, rather than a negative or fearful response. The anticipated outcome is that the community will better understand many of the areas of concern to the CalFed Bay-Delta Program by understanding how those areas of concern affect their local watershed.

This project also supports the Outreach component of the Merced River Education Initiative. The mission of this group of stakeholders, educators and researchers is to provide innovative educational opportunities regarding the Merced River to Merced County residents and to create successful model programs that can assist in other watersheds. Three interdependent components will frame this work: 1) Education (formal K-12 curriculum), 2) Outreach (to and engaging the larger community), and 3) scientific and historical research. Framework diagram is attached.

2. Describe the level of community involvement and activity anticipated in this project, including the following elements:

a. How will your activity promote community and landowner/user involvement in watershed management?

Current Experience with the Merced River Stakeholder Group has shown that the participants are very action oriented. When they see how a new idea might help their business or land management activity, they are quick to implement it or to ask other resource people within the group for assistance. The River Town Hall series will provide a broader scope of watershed topics for stakeholders to evaluate for action.

b. What level of support is there from the local community and agencies?

This proposal was generated at the direction of the Merced River Stakeholder Group which includes landowners, Merced County, the San Joaquin Raptor Center, Merced Irrigation District, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, recreational interests, East Merced Resource Conservation District, aggregate mining interests, agricultural interests, California Departments of Fish and Game, Transportation, Water resources, flyfishers, and community interests. Attendance at stakeholder Group meetings ranges from 25 to 70 individuals.

c. How will the activity foster collaboration among multiple interests or scientific disciplines?

The River Town Hall series will provide an opportunity to encourage developing partnerships and provide additional impetus for new collaboration. These gatherings will be staged in a location convenient to the served community and will provide information through a more informal and social setting. Topical presentations will also be geared to providing information on how other communities or watershed groups have acted on similar issues.

d. How will your project reach out to and encourage the active participation of local leadership and diverse community interests?

The River Town Hall Series will be more broadly publicized than current Stakeholder Group meetings. Currently, the Stakeholder Group meetings are announced through mailings and are scheduled somewhat irregularly. The River Town Hall meetings will occur at consistent times and locations to increase accessibility. Correlation of this project with the educational component of the Merced River Education Initiative through teachers and classroom involvement will reach out to a broader community, also. This spring the Stakeholder Group and the East Merced Resource Conservation District will host a tour of the lower watershed for local and regional community leadership. If this concept is accepted, this group can be more closely involved.

e. How will the activity contribute to on-going effective local management of the watershed?

This activity will complement on-going watershed activities by providing community information on topical areas not currently or consistently addressed. CALFED is currently funding the development of a focussed river restoration plan which addresses geomorphic and riparian habitat concepts only. The Merced River Stakeholder Group is recognizing that watershed stewardship extends beyond these concepts and seeks to build on the current planning effort.

f. What are the potential benefits to the local community, and how will those benefits be measured?

The potential benefits to the community will vary from individuals taking small actions, like proper disposal of potential water contaminants in one's home, to major landowners making substantial changes in their land use practices. For the River Town Hall project, a voluntary sign-in of attendees will be requested. At the end of the series, a questionnaire will be distributed for participants to respond to regarding what benefit they feel they have received from the series. The Questionnaire will be designed in consultation with an experienced consultant or university faculty. Assistance from CALFED staff to recommend effective evaluation techniques would be appreciated.

g. How will the project benefits be distributed equitably within the community?

Broad publicity of River Town Hall series will be non-exclusive. The purpose of this project is to increase the knowledge base of the entire community related to the Merced River.

h. How does your project promote local community involvement with the continued development and implementation of the CALFED Bay Delta Program? The topical areas will be chosen to link community information needs with goals and objectives of the CALFED Bay Delta Program. For example - water quality in the Merced River is not only an issue locally, but also in regions downstream of the river.

3. Describe how the concept demonstrates the value and contributions of watershed management (using a community based and locally led approach) to achieving CALFED goals for the Bay delta system and broader solution area (see Section 7).

Prior to 1998 there were no watershed oriented groups or for a in existence on the Merced River. Landowners in the lower watershed will tell you that the last time they got together was about 25 years ago when their water rights were threatened. In general the community is small, rural and fiercely independent and individualistic. Restoration actions to enhance salmon populations on the Merced River have been proceeding since the 1970's led by agencies like the California Department of Fish and Game. Until recently, these actions were addressed on a site-by site basis. Creation of the Merced River Stakeholder Group has facilitated significant information exchange among all participants and has fostered a recognition of both common issues and divergent opinions. The group was initially highly suspicious of outside interests like CALFED and agencies providing funding to do actions on their river. Over the past 2 ½ years of working together the community has developed an understanding of **ecosystem quality** issues important to CALFED but from the perspective of how ecosystem quality affects their lives, businesses and community. In part this has resulted from the CVPIA-Anadromous Fish Restoration Program providing funding to Merced County and the East Merced Resource Conservation District to help establish the Stakeholder Group and from CALFED providing funding to the County and Stillwater Sciences to develop baseline geomorphic and riparian information and a fluvial process oriented restoration plan.

In addition, the Stakeholder Group has recently identified other topical areas where they feel the community does not have sufficient information to identify problems and appropriate actions. These topics include **water quality, water supply** (very important if UC Merced proceeds), and **floodway management**, which are also CALFED goals. The River Town Hall Series is proposed as the first step to creating a community dialog relating to these issues and to identifying problem resolutions. The connection to CALFED keeps an awareness in the community that their choices unstream do affect downstream conditions.

4. Describe how the proposal promotes one or more of the initial implementation priorities of the Watershed Program (see Section 5).

This proposal strongly supports capacity building in the local community. By the time that funds for this project become available, the Geomorphic and Riparian Restoration planning process should be nearing completion. The River Town Hall series is intended to provide continuing impetus to encourage the Stakeholder Group to continue to progress in its stewardship of the watershed by identifying the next key issue areas for action. This proposal also supports watershed education, both for the community and for the formal educational institutions by providing in-service opportunities for Merced County teachers. Added community awareness will also provide support for on-going and future restoration actions on the lower Merced River. Additionally there is the opportunity in this River Town Hall series to focus one session on related actions occurring in the upper Merced River watershed.

5. Describe how your proposal will establish or enhance a partnership between the local community and the CALFED Bay Delta Program.

Previous CALFED Bay Delta Program funding for the Merced River Restoration plan development was initially received with a high level of local skepticism. The project was perceived as being generated outside the local community and not addressing local issues. The process of establishing a Stakeholder Group and actively providing them tools, access to agency resources, and engaging them in the planning process has substantially reduced (but not eliminated) that skepticism. In this project, the Stakeholder Group has identified the need and the group is approaching the CALFED Bay-Delta Program for assistance. The topics identified by the group for the River Town Hall series coincidentally also are compatible with issues identified by the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. This is an opportunity for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program to continue interaction with the local community and support a community generated project, thereby increasing the mutual value of that partnership.

6. Describe how your project will promote information exchange, including project monitoring and the transfer of technical information, among CALFED and others interested in watershed management.

The essence of this project is information exchange. However products resulting from this project will include a listing of the River Town Hall program topics, speakers and contact information, a report on the publicity and outreach, attendance and the closing evaluation questionnaire. These products will be useful to other watershed groups to conduct a similar project.

7. Describe here any other important aspects of your program that you could not address in the above items, and that you feel are critical to fully describing your concept.

As stated above, this project also supports the Outreach component of the Merced River Education Initiative. Because of the structure of the pre-proposal process there are two other companion pre-proposals being generated under the Merced River Education Initiative. One addresses initial water quality baseline data collection, an aspect of the research and outreach portions of the initiative. The other addresses community needs for education (K-12) support and assistance. Also there is a proposal to evaluate Mercury contamination potential in dredge tailings used for restoration actions. These proposals have all been submitted to address needs identified by the Merced River Stakeholder Group and the Merced River Education Initiative.

Do you anticipate a desire for possible technical assistance from CALFED to fully develop your proposal?
Y__X__ N_____.

If yes, what type of assistance do you anticipate?

Feedback on areas to strengthen proposal. Recommendations for speakers, reasonable honoraria and budget considerations. Assistance from CALFED staff to recommend effective evaluation techniques would be appreciated.